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SUBJECT: LEBANON: SINIORA HITS BACK AT NASRALLAH'S
ACCUSATIONS

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) In a rebuttal to Hassan Nasrallah's speech the previous day, PM Siniora rejected threatening language and the label "traitor," stressing the unity of all Lebanese. Siniora condemned the arrogance that had led Nasrallah to judge his fellow leaders' patriotism and honesty, and to determine when the Prime Ministership needed to be changed. Siniora dropped bombshells when he revealed that the LAF had been ordered to support Hizballah, not oppose it, during the Israel-Hizballah War; and that Tehran sought to keep the Shebaa Farms occupied to provide a pretext to Hizballah to keep its weapons indefinitely. End Summary.

REBUTTAL

¶2. (SBU) Prime Minister Siniora spoke today in response to Hizballah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah's December 7 tirade, delivering a point-by-point rebuttal of its accusations. Siniora urged Nasrallah to calm down, a reference to the sweat-streaked brow and strident language that had typified Nasrallah's delivery the previous day.

NASRALLAH'S ARROGANCE

¶3. (SBU) Siniora indicted Nasrallah's arrogance, describing it as "amazing" that Nasrallah should hand out or withhold "certificates of patriotism" for Lebanese leaders, as if he were the arbiter of who is patriotic and who is a traitor. Siniora expressed special resentment for the "traitor" label, which Nasrallah had employed liberally in several previous speeches.

¶4. (SBU) In response to Nasrallah's call for early parliamentary elections and the replacement of the Prime Minister, Siniora asked how Nasrallah could decide who would be PM in a democratic country unless he intended to change the government by force.

¶5. (SBU) Finally, Siniora returned Nasrallah's frequently-repeated accusation of corruption within the March 14-led cabinet. The PM asked how Nasrallah could determine which funds were clean and which not clean. Throwing the accusation back, he asked whether or not Hizballah funding from Iran should be considered "clean."

BOMBSHELLS

16. (SBU) The Prime Minister had one major bombshell in his speech for the Lebanese political scene. He recounted that, in an August meeting at the Serail, the Iranian Ambassador had asked Siniora not to seek the return of the Shebaa Farms from Israel. The Ambassador intended to indefinitely preserve the pretext under which Hizballah had been maintaining its arsenal of heavy weapons.

17. (SBU) In another headline maker, Siniora gave the lie to one of Nasrallah's principal accusations -- that the GOL had issued orders to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to disrupt Hizballah weapon shipments during Hizballah's July-August war with Israel. Siniora cited LAF Commander Michel Sleiman's communique earlier that day that clarified that on the single occasion on which the LAF confiscated a weapons shipment, the central government ordered the weapons returned to Hizballah. (Siniora's rebuttal, of course, causes problems in our direction.)

UNITY AND STEADFASTNESS

18. (SBU) Siniora rejected Nasrallah's use of the term "camps" to describe Lebanon's feuding political factions. We are all Lebanese, he stressed. He added that he resented threats and incitement on the part of the opposition.

19. (SBU) Responding to the Hizballah leader's ultimatum that Siniora should "make a deal while he still can," the Prime Minister concluded that the door to negotiations was still

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open, but that he would not resign.
FELTMAN